

Ambassador Robert D. McCallum, Jr.
Remarks in honor of America's Independence Day
July 4, 2008

Ambassadors, Ministers, Members of Parliament,
Members of the Armed Forces of Australia and the
United States, Fellow citizens of the United States,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the American people and on behalf of the
US Embassy in Canberra, Mimi and I welcome you to our
residence to observe with us the Two Hundred and Thirty
Second “birthday” of our nation. We call our national
holiday on July Fourth our “Independence Day” as it
commemorates the signing of our Declaration of
Independence in 1776. Each year, Americans gather all
over the world to celebrate joyously the beginning of a
great and good nation founded upon the democratic
principles of equality and individual liberty as expressed
in that historic document by our Founding Fathers.

This year, Mimi and I invite you to join us in recognizing
as part of this celebration the unique contributions of the
colonial settlement of Williamsburg, Virginia to the
values and principles that eventually resulted in this
historic document and, through it, a distinct American
national identity. Williamsburg, Virginia, was and is

located in what is called the Tidewater Region of that State, a few miles inland from the original Jamestown settlement of 1607. Williamsburg was “founded” in 1632, and the College of William and Mary was established there in 1693. It is the second oldest college in the United States, Harvard University in Massachusetts being the first. Williamsburg became the capital of the Virginia colony in 1699, and it was the center of Virginia’s intellectual, economic, cultural, and political life through the Revolutionary War.

The influence of Williamsburg on our Founding Fathers can not be overstated. George Washington received his surveyor’s license from the College of William and Mary, and Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, came to the college in 1760 for his formal education in the law under his mentor and tutor George Wythe. Wythe became the first Virginian to sign the Declaration of Independence drafted by his former student. It was here that Jefferson, Wythe, Patrick Henry (“Give me liberty or give me death”), James Monroe (Fifth President of the United States), James Madison (the Fourth President of the United States and the principal author of US Constitution), Peyton Randolph (President of the first Continental Congress), and many more formulated a vision for a new democratic nation.

It is especially appropriate for us to honor Williamsburg here at the US Embassy in Canberra. We stand today in a campus constructed in the colonial architectural design of Williamsburg. It was the first embassy constructed here in Canberra, begun in 1942 during the Second World War, and it was opened by then First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in 1944. This residence and the Chancery were modeled on buildings from Williamsburg to represent visually to all Australians a distinctly American identity and a committed American presence at a time of great peril to both our nations. Its Williamsburg design and character are unique among our embassies and reflect the unique bond between the American and Australian peoples.

The entire colonial area of Williamsburg is today an authentic, living history museum under the auspices of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. It is the result of one of the largest historical preservation projects ever undertaken in the United States. Begun in 1926, it was accomplished through the generosity of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and his wife, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. The preservation effort involved a combination of extensive restoration of more than 80 original colonial structures and the thoughtful and accurate recreation of other sites to their original eighteenth century specifications. The preservation district encompasses the

entire historic area, and visitors can now sense and experience aspects of daily life from that important colonial period as they walk down the restored streets and through the restored buildings and gardens. Visitors encounter characters in period dress who discuss the great issues of the day facing our Founding Fathers and who reenact significant events in the history of Colonial Williamsburg.

As you walked through the residence today, we have displayed videos of some of the art, gardens, and architecture which are part of Colonial Williamsburg, and Mimi and I thank the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation for sharing that virtual reality with us. The food that is being passed is also reminiscent of colonial days in Virginia: ham, chicken, mutton, turkey, shrimp, and peanuts to name a few Virginia staples that we will be enjoying today. As you will hear with the playing of the Australian and American national anthems, the music also reflects our colonial days, and I am especially grateful to our talented drum and fife musicians from the Royal Military College Band and the ANU School of Music for joining us today on the fiftieth anniversary of the formation and first performance of the drum and fife corps at Colonial Williamsburg.

Finally, I would like to share with you a special message from the President of the United States:

“I send greetings to all Americans on Independence Day.

More than two centuries ago, bold and courageous visionaries pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor in signing the Declaration of Independence. Guided by ancient and eternal truths, our forefathers proclaimed to the world that liberty was the natural right of all mankind and in doing so began one of the greatest chapters in human history. On the Fourth of July, our country commemorates the great achievements of these heroes and reaffirms its unwavering confidence in the power of freedom.

It was the desire for freedom that inspired our Founding Fathers, and it is the belief in the universality of freedom that guides our Nation. On this occasion, we pay special tribute to the men and women of our Armed Forces, both past and present, who have answered freedom's call and defended the values that make America the greatest country on earth.

May God bless America.”

GEORGE W. BUSH